

# OPERA IRELAND NEWS

WINTER 2000

Artistic Director: Dieter Kaegi  
Executive Director: David Collopy

## WINTER SEASON 2000

Giacomo Puccini

### MADAMA BUTTERFLY

Sung in Italian with English surtitles

Madama Butterfly	Regina Nathan
Suzuki	Patricia Fernandez
Kate Pinkerton	Sandra Oman
B F Pinkerton	Juremir Vieira
Sharpless	Sam McElroy
Goro	Mark Curtis
Prince Yamadori	Nyle Wolf
The Bonze	William Peel

Conductor:	David Heusel
Director:	Georgii Isakhkhan
Set Designer:	Stephanie Pasterkamp
Costume designer:	Sarah Bown
Lighting designer:	Paul Keogan

November 18, 20, 22, 24 & 26, at 7.30 pm

Dimitri Shostakovich

### LADY MACBETH OF MTSENSK

(Irish premiere – sung in Russian  
with English surtitles)

Katerina Ismailova	Helen Field
Sergei	Alan Woodrow
Boris Ismailov	Gerard O'Connor
Zinovy Ismailov	Serguei Vlassov
Shabby Peasant	Volker Vogel
Aksinya	Franzita Whelan
Teacher	Pavel Brugin
Priest	Dimitry Kanevsky
Sergeant	Alexey Djugaev
Sonyetka	Tatyana Kaminskaya
Old Convict	Grant Dickson
Porter	Nyle Wolf
Steward	Alexey Djugaev
A Foreman	Pavel Bragin
A Foreman	Mark Curtis
Chief of Police	William Peel
Woman Convict	Elizabeth Woods

Conductor:	Alexander Anissimov
Director:	Dieter Kaegi
Designer:	Joe Vanek
Lighting Designer:	Paul Keogan

November 19, 21, 23 & 25 at 7.30 pm

### OPERA IRELAND CHORUS

(Chorus master: Cathal Garvey)

### RTÉ CONCERT ORCHESTRA

### GAITY THEATRE, DUBLIN

Tickets £10 to £50

Booking: Opera Ireland Box Office:  
Tel (01) 453 5519  
Fax: (01) 453 5521  
E-mail: info@opera-ireland.ie  
**NO BOOKING FEE**

# FIELD IS IRELAND'S FIRST KATERINA

**Helen Field**, the Welsh soprano who makes her Opera Ireland debut as Katerina Ismailova, the protagonist in Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, is a lady much in demand. Her busy schedule has taken her to engagements in major opera houses and concert venues all over Europe as well as further afield to Los Angeles and the Metropolitan in New York.

She began her career with Welsh National Opera where her roles included



Mimi and Musetta, Gilda, Marenka (*The Bartered Bride*), Tatyana, Janáček's Vixen and Jenufa, Desdemona and Butterfly. She then began an association with Opera North, with whom she has sung Violetta, Donna Anna, Susanna, Pamina, Strauss's Daphne, Massenet's Manon and the title role in Puccini's *La rondine*. For Scottish Opera she repeated the Vixen and added Katya Kabanova. Her most recent role in Scotland was Salome earlier this year. Her frequent appearances at English National Opera have included Gilda, Violetta, Anna, Jennifer (*Midsummer Marriage*), Pamina, the Duchess of Parma (Busoni's *Doktor Faust*) and Gounod's Marguerite.

In 1989 Helen Field created the role of Jo Ann in the world premiere of Michael Tippett's opera *New Year* in Houston, a role she repeated at Glyndebourne Festival. In 1996 she sang the title role in the British premiere of James Macmillan's *Ines de Castro* at Edinburgh. Her versatile repertoire also includes leading soprano roles in Birtwhistle's *The Second Mrs Kong*, *Fidelio*, *Turn of the Screw* and Strauss's *Die ägyptische Helena*.

On CD she can be heard in recordings of Janáček's *Osud*, Martinu's *Greek Passion*, Delius's *A Village Romeo and Juliet* and the ENO recording of Verdi's *Rigoletto*. She has also recorded Rossini's *Stabat Mater* and *Petite Messe Solenne* as well as an album of Baroque arias and Coleridge Taylor's choral work *Hiawatha*.

## STRANGE HARMONY OF CONTRASTS

**They were composed a mere thirty years apart. They are both 20th-century operatic masterpieces. But the two works featured in Opera Ireland's winter season at the Gaiety Theatre in November began their respective stage lives in markedly contrary circumstances.**

Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* had a disastrous opening night at La Scala on 17 February 1904, but went on to become, and remain, one of the most popular operas of all time. Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, which is receiving its first ever production in this country, fared rather differently. It opened at the Maly Theatre in Leningrad, as it was then, in January 1934 and enjoyed enormous success in the USSR and elsewhere for about two years before Joseph Stalin went to see it, didn't like what he saw, and condemned it out of hand. It's only in the last quarter of a century or so that the opera has regained its status as one of the century's most compelling music-theatre creations.



# The Opera

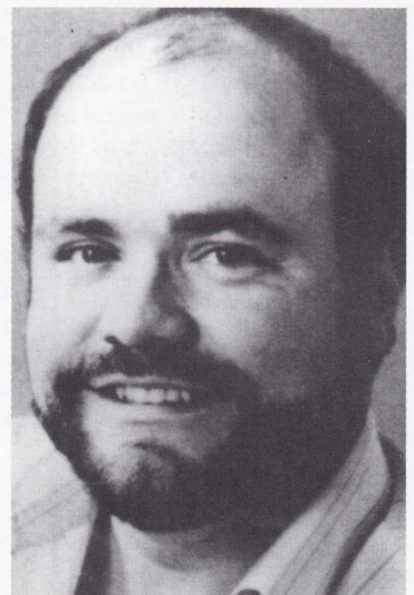
**What is it about Russian operatic heroines throwing themselves into rivers? Lisa does it in Tchaikovsky's *The Queen of Spades*; Katya Kabanova, as we saw last season, finishes up in the Volga in Janáček's Russian-set opera; And Katerina Ismailova takes the plunge at the end of the Shostakovich work which is having its Irish premiere in Dublin this winter.**

Dimitri Shostakovich (1906-1975) composed his opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, after the short story of the same name by Nikolai Leskov, between 1929 and 1932. As with his first opera, *The Nose*, the composer himself wrote the libretto in collaboration with the writer and dramatic advisor Alexander Preis. It is the story of a merchant's wife, Katerina Ismailova, who attempts to break out of the confines of her unhappy marriage and of the narrow society of 19th century Russia. In so doing, she becomes the lover of her husband's employee Sergei and, in order to live out this supposed 'true love', murders her husband and father-in-law. On the way to prison camp, she kills Sergei's new lover, and finally throws herself into the river in desperation.

*Shostakovich in the early 1930s*

Although the opera's protagonist is given the pejorative name Lady Macbeth, Shostakovich made it quite clear that his sympathies lay entirely with his anti-heroine. 'Katerina is a beautiful, intelligent young girl who is being smothered in the world of vulgar commerce' is how he claimed to see her. 'The murders she commits are not so much real crimes as a revolt against her circumstances and against the sordid and sickening atmosphere in which middle-class merchants of the 19th-century lived.' And there speaks a good Communist.

In the opening scenes, when Katerina sings of her boredom, her music alternates wistful longing with enraged frustration. Later, while she is



*Alan Woodrow, who sings the role of Katerina's lover Sergei*



# Stalin Hated

getting ready for bed, she has a melancholic aria about her loneliness in which the voice soars in desperation. The two love scenes between Katerina and her paramour Sergei are skillfully contrasted. The first, with its exquisite tension and intense sexuality, is absolutely riveting. The couple's second scene is more idyllic. The other major role in the opera is Boris Ismailov, Katerina's menacing father-in-law. He dominates her in his son's absence, watching her every move, telling her

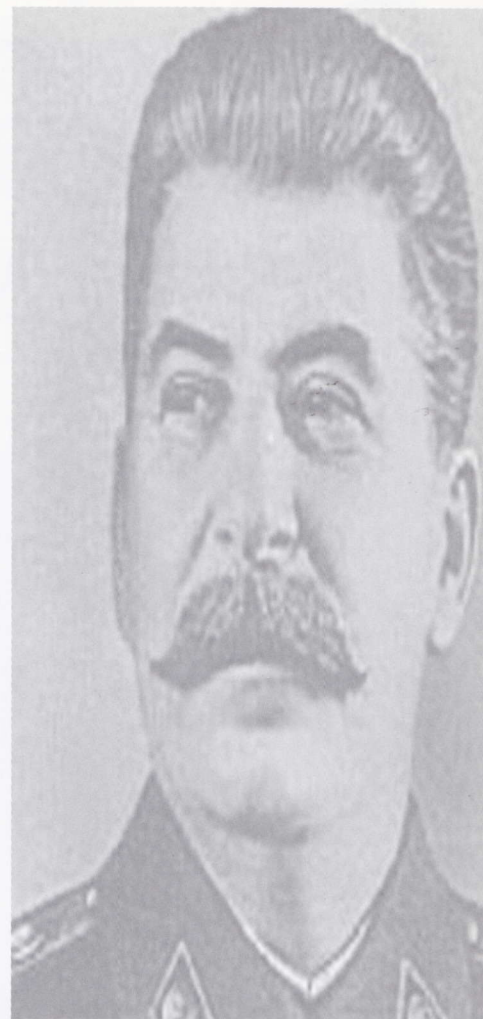
when its time to go to sleep, and making passes at her whenever he can.

The harrowing scene in which she poisons him in a darkened room is the stuff of nightmares.

*Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* had its premiere at the Maly Theatre in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) on 22 January 1934. It was enormously popular and received more than eighty performances. It was even more successful in Moscow, until Joseph Stalin went to see it in 1936, and walked out before the last act. He was incensed, he claimed, by the sexual frankness, the suggestion

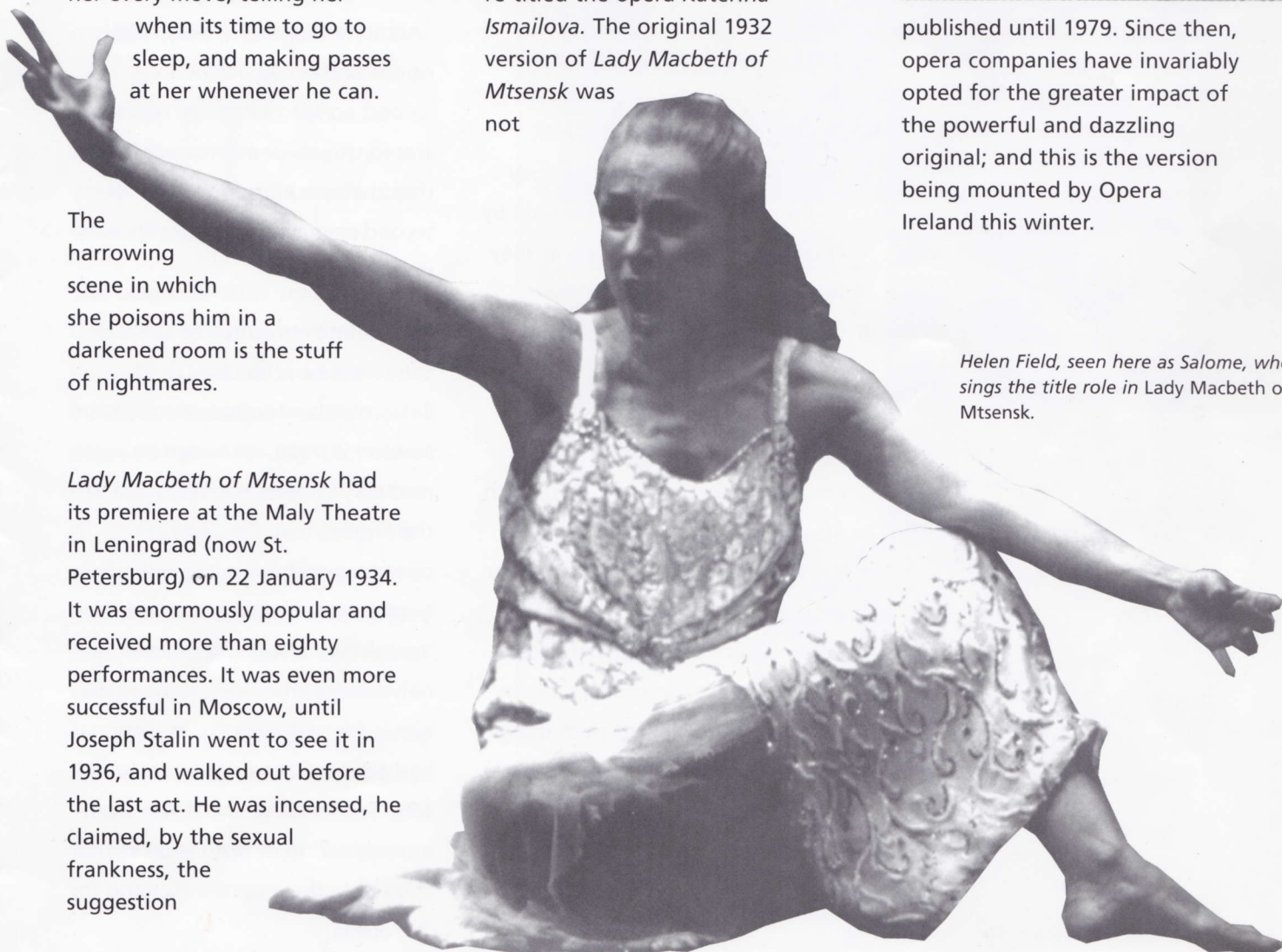
that life in rural Russia could be 'boring', and the opera's depiction of the country's police system as 'corrupt'. *Pravda* labelled the work 'Chaos instead of music'. Afraid not only for his livelihood but for his life, Shostakovich withdrew the earthy score and the work disappeared for more than thirty years.

In 1958, three years after Stalin's death, the composer reworked the story, softened the score and re-titled the opera *Katerina Ismailova*. The original 1932 version of *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* was not



published until 1979. Since then, opera companies have invariably opted for the greater impact of the powerful and dazzling original; and this is the version being mounted by Opera Ireland this winter.

Helen Field, seen here as Salome, who sings the title role in *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*.





# Puccini's Favourite 'Little Woman'



Giacomo Puccini

***Madama Butterfly* was Puccini's own favourite among his operas. He called it his 'most deeply felt and imaginative invention', and he lavished more love and energy on its heroine than he did on any of his other 'little women'.**

*Butterfly* is one of that select group of operatic masterpieces which have survived disastrous opening nights. Mind you, if the La Scala audience on that fraught evening of 17 February 1904 had been familiar with the music of Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, composed two years earlier, they might not have been as shocked by Puccini's innovative scoring as they appear to have been. But then these things always appear more simple in retrospect. As it was, a public which had accepted the romantic melodies of *Manon Lescaut*, *La Bohème* and *Tosca* with open arms was so nonplussed by the new opera that it reacted with shouting and booing so loud that much of the music went unheard. And when the composer came on stage in an attempt to calm things down, he was quickly hooted back into the wings.

The opera was immediately withdrawn and replaced by a

hastily put-together revival of Gounod's *Faust*. But Puccini remained obdurate and loyal to his faith in the viability of what he had written. He did, however, allow himself to be persuaded by some of his intimates to take another look at the structure of the work with a view to making a few minor alterations. He excised some of the minor characters' pseudo-oriental music, extended the tenor role – adding the aria "Addio fiorito asil" – and, most significantly, divided the long second act into two parts. And it was in this revised three-act format that the opera triumphed at its second premiere in Brescia three months later.

Puccini first encountered Cio-Cio-San when he attended David Belasco's play *Madame Butterfly* in London in 1900. Although he probably understood very little of the English text, he could see operatic potential in the tale of a geisha who allows herself to be 'bought' by a foreigner in the naive belief that her 'marriage' to him is for real. Belasco, in turn, had adapted the original story by John Luther Long and it was from a combination of both sources that Luigi Illica drew up the scenario for the opera.



# Three Irish Butterflies

As was his wont, Puccini wrangled long and intrepidly with his librettists – the actual words were, as usual, supplied by Giuseppe Giacosa – before the work finally assumed the shape with which it took to the stage at La Scala. The score includes a number of authentic Japanese melodies and, together with the occasional use of the pentatonic scale and exotic instrumental colouring, they blend perfectly with Puccini's usual melodic facility and mastery of harmony and orchestral texture, to make this the Italian opera *par excellence*, a work whose lyricism presents its composer to us in his tenderest and sweetest vein.

The opera contains many of the best-known, and most often requested, operatic moments: Butterfly's entrance aria; the extended marriage-night love duet; the heroine's ever-popular 'Un bel di'; the poignant letter scene; the climactic sighting of Pinkerton's ship and the ecstatic flower duet that follows; the gentle humming chorus; Pinkerton's remorseful farewell; and Butterfly's harrowing suicide aria at the end.



Top left: Margaret Sheridan, who first sang the role of Cio-Cio-San at Teatro Del Verme in Milan in 1919. She recorded the complete opera for HMV in Milan in 1930.



Above: May Devitt, who sang Butterfly in six different DGOS productions in Dublin and Cork between 1942 and 1946.



Regina Nathan, who will sing the title role in *Madama Butterfly* for Opera Ireland this season.



# DOUBLE SPRING SUCCESS

What the critics said

Dieter Kaegi achieved a double success in his spring season at the Gaiety Theatre. In his own imaginative production (of *Aida*) he proved that size does not really count and provided a spectacle as triumphant as its Triumphant March. Bruno Schwengl's sets provided an impressive minimalist counter-balance.

*OPERA*

Each scene was like a refined painterly tableau and drew gasps of awe from the full house.  
*IRISH EXAMINER*

The effect, aided by Adam Silverman's saturated lighting, is often visually striking.  
*IRISH TIMES*

Georgina Benza has a Verdian voice that could grace any opera house, a radiant top matched by an ability to sing really softly.  
*OPERA*

The *Aida* of Georgina Benza consistently lifted the evening onto a higher level.  
*IRISH TIMES*

Georgina Benza's Gruberova-like high register lent majesty and distinction ...  
*OPERA NOW*

*Amneris* is sung with a quality of warmth by Patricia Spence.  
*EVENING HERALD*

*Amneris* was powerfully created by Patricia Spence.  
*SUNDAY TRIBUNE*

Bulgarian tenor Emil Ivanov challenged José Cura in his trumpet-like tones and good looks.  
*OPERA*

Marcel Vanaud was a superb Amonasro.  
*OPERA*

Elizabeth Woods has stunning stage presence in a less central role as the High Priestess.  
*IRISH EXAMINER*



# A KATYA THAT 'SHIMMERED AND SOARED'

## What the critics said

Opera Ireland's *Katya Kabanova* shimmered and soared with dark passion throughout. Given that (it) is so rarely performed, this version ... was a rare and profound privilege.

*IRISH EXAMINER*

Franzita Whelan powerfully takes centre stage to delineate a woman torn apart by guilt, desire and confusion.

*IRISH EXAMINER*

Franzita Whelan ... was convincing and deeply moving. Her sure vocal technique and easy assumption of the Czech text provided her with a triumphant Dublin debut, marking her as the latest in our impressive list of new Irish singing stars.

*OPERA*

Franzita Whelan ... was wholly in charge of the technical challenges.

*OPERA NOW*

Volker Vogel ... captures the discrepancy of will and deed of (Katya's) husband Tikhon, whose resistance to the fierce bullying of his mother, the strongly manipulative Kabanicha is revealed with terrifying sharpness by Janice Meyerson.

*IRISH TIMES*

Janice Meyerson icily portrays the relentless cruelty of Katya's mother-in-law.

*EVENING HERALD*



*Franzita Whelan*

Sophie Pondjiclis is irrepressible as Varvara.

*IRISH TIMES*

Sophie Pondjiclis gave an incisive, hugely enjoyable account of Varvara. There was a handsomely horrible account of the unspeakable mother from Janice Meyerson.

*OPERA NOW*

Gerard O'Connor continued his excellent series of bass characters with a powerful portrayal of the rich merchant Dikoy.

*SUNDAY TRIBUNE*

Schwengl's big box set, with its monochrome clouds and river ... provided a suitably menacing context for the drama.

*OPERA*

... extraordinarily beautiful sets by Bruno Schwengl ...

*IRISH EXAMINER*





# THE GREAT O'MARA

**PADDY BRENNAN** recalls the career of a celebrated Irish tenor

**Ever since a certain concert given on a summer night in Rome during the 1990 World Cup, we have been assailed by the phenomenon of the Three Tenors. More recently, and nearer home, we have had the Three Irish Tenors, the Three Young Tenors, the Three Celtic Tenors, and so on. But there was a time, back in the early decades of the 20th-century, when Ireland really could boast of having three great tenors, singers who appeared regularly on the world's leading opera stages. Alongside John McCormack (1884-1945), the one with the highest profile today, there was John O'Sullivan (1878-1955), the Cork-born dramatic tenor who performed mainly in France, and Joseph O'Mara from Limerick.**

Joseph O'Mara, who was born on 16 July 1864, was the second youngest of a family of thirteen. His father was the founding owner of the bacon-curing firm, O'Mara Ltd, and the family can claim to have been one of the most distinguished of their time in Limerick and Munster, with various members distinguishing themselves in the diverse worlds of commerce, church and politics.

Educated at the Crescent College in Limerick, Joseph sang in the choir at St Michael's and, encouraged by his teachers and friends, he set off for Milan on New Year's Day 1889 where he studied with Signor Moretti for almost two years.

Returning home, Sir Arthur Sullivan offered him a share in the title role of his new opera, *Ivanhoe*, which was to inaugurate D'Oyly Carte's Royal English Opera House at Cambridge Circus (now the Palace Theatre). O'Mara shared the title role with Ben Davies, then England's leading tenor, and made his own debut on 4 February 1891 to much acclaim, including a paean from George Bernard Shaw, who delighted in his fellow countryman's success. This was followed by a run of Messager's *The Basoche*, after which D'Oyly Carte's English Opera venture folded. O'Mara's voice attracted great notice and he received many concert engagements. He returned to Italy and later France for more periods of study.

In 1893 Sir Augustus Harris, then lessee of the Royal Opera House Covent Garden, contracted O'Mara as principal tenor for his Royal Italian Opera Tour of the British Isles. Starting in Edinburgh on 11



September, the tour went on to Glasgow, Liverpool, Newcastle, Manchester, Limerick, Cork Dublin and Brighton. His first appearance was in *Cavalleria rusticana* in Edinburgh on 12 September. On that tour he also sang in *Pagliacci*, *Meistersinger*, *Lohengrin*, *Carmen* and *Faust*. The following May he made his debut at Covent Garden in *Cavalleria*, sharing the role of Turiddu with no less a personage than Fernando De Lucia, opposite the Santuzza of Emma Calve and the Alfio of Mario Ancona.

That season he was also the apprentice David to the Walther of Jean DeReszke in *Die Meistersinger* with Emma Eames, Ancona and Pol Plançon. He continued to work with Harris for the next two years, and on 2 March 1896 created the role of Mike Murphy in Stanford's *Shamus O'Brien* at the Opera Comique in the Strand, London, with Louise Kirkby Lunn and Denis O'Sullivan. Harris wanted him for the summer season at Covent Garden, but Joe had had a more important engagement. He married Bride Power from Waterford on 24 June, and after their honeymoon, joined up with the *Shamus O'Brien* tour which arrived in Dublin 23 November for the 25th Anniversary celebrations of the Gaiety Theatre. The tour travelled to America, where O'Mara was such a success that he was persuaded to return later that year to star in the world premiere of Reginald De Koven's *The Highwayman*, which opened at New York's Broadway Theatre on 13 December and ran for six months.

Returning to London in the spring of 1899 he found that the age of oratorios, concerts and musical 'at homes' was at its height. He sang in practically every house of note. At one of the soirées, given by the Duchess of Manchester for the future King Edward VII, his fellow artists were Nellie Melba, Pol



Plançon, Jan Kubelik and Jan Paderewski, with Landon Ronald as accompanist.

But opera was O'Mara's first love, and in 1902 he joined the Moody-Manners Company as principal tenor, with whom he toured for ten years. On the 28 November 1906 he shared the bill with John McCormack in a charity concert at Dublin's Theatre Royal, at which Vincent O'Brien and John Larchet were the accompanists. He received the Freedom of the City of Limerick in October 1908, following which he returned to New York for *Peggy Machree*, a romantic musical comedy by Patrick Bidwell. In 1909 and 1910 he was part of the Beecham Company London Seasons at Covent Garden and His Majesty's Theatre where his roles included *Shamus O'Brien*, *Die Fledermaus* (Eisenstein), *Carmen*, *Hoffmann*, *Faust* (with Maggie Teyte and Giuseppe Di Luca) and *Fidelio*.

In 1912 he took the plunge and formed his own O'Mara Grand Opera Company, and toured with it throughout Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales until he retired from the stage in 1926. Thereafter the company was managed by Cynlais Gibbs and Matt Byrne until it gave its last performances in Cork in 1934. For the first season in Dublin October 1913, O'Mara opened to universal acclaim singing Raoul in Meyerbeer's *Huguenots*. This was followed by *Faust*, *Rigoletto*, *Bohemian Girl*, *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin*, *Il trovatore* and *The Lily of Killarney*. The company then moved to the Opera

House in Cork for two weeks, following which he made a triumphal return to his hometown of Limerick, opening in the Theatre Royal there, on Monday 10 November in *Il trovatore*.

By 1919 the O'Mara Company was so popular in Dublin's Gaiety Theatre that it was engaged for four weeks in February and another four in June. This continued for a number of years despite the fact that the Carl Rosa Company also gave three weeks of opera there in the Autumn.

Joseph O'Mara was a great singing actor, with 67 roles to his credit. He sang in five languages, English, Irish, Italian, French and German. Stories abound of his histrionic abilities in roles as diverse as Rodolfo, Radamès, Samson, Canio, Eleazar in *La Juive*, Mike Murphy, the villain in *Shamus O'Brien*, Myles-na-gCoppaleen in *The Lily of Killarney*, *Tannhäuser*, *Tosca*, *Pagliacci*, *Lohengrin* and *Carmen*. He sang in the Irish premieres of many operas, including *Madam Butterfly*, *Manon Lescaut*, *La Wally*, *La Gioconda*, *Samson and Delilah* and, a real rarity, Kienzl's *Der Evangelimann*.

O'Mara adjudicated at both the Dublin Feis Ceoil, where he presented a cup that is still competed for, and the Sligo Feis. He also sang three songs at the opening night of Irish Radio[2RN] on 1 January 1926. He died in Dublin on 5 August 1927. Unfortunately, his handful of known recordings, all of them rare, don't do him any sort of justice.

## RESEARCHING O'MARA

Eileen O'Mara Walsh, Chairman of Opera Ireland, is a grand-daughter of Joseph O'Mara. She and her sister Mary are currently working with Paddy Brendan on researching the life and career of the tenor. Paddy Brennan would like to hear from anyone with personal memories and stories of the O'Mara touring days. A loan or copies of programmes and memorabilia would be much appreciated. He can be contacted through Opera Ireland or by e-mail- [nozzari@eircom.net](mailto:nozzari@eircom.net)

## MEETING THE PRODUCTION TEAMS

Opera Ireland is once again hosting its OPERA INSIGHTS this season. These are open sessions at which the conductor, director and designer(s) of each of the two winter opera productions will discuss their concepts and answer questions about them. Both sessions will take place in the main auditorium of the Gaiety Theatre from 1 pm to 2 pm. The *Madama Butterfly* team will be there on Thursday 16 November and the *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* team will be in attendance on Friday 17 November. Admission is free.

### OPERA IRELAND LECTURES

In association with The Irish Times

The 2000/2001 series of opera lectures given by JOHN ALLEN will take place as usual every month at the Bank of Ireland Arts Centre in Foster Place, College Green, Dublin 2

Monday 18 September  
**Whom the Gods love ...**  
Jussi Björling & Fritz Wunderlich anniversaries

Monday 23 October  
**Nessun dorma!**  
Italian *verismo* operas by Puccini and others

Monday 6 November  
**Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk & Madama Butterfly**  
Previewing Opera Ireland's Winter Season

Monday 4 December  
**Opera for Christmas**  
A round-up of the year's best opera CDs

Monday 8 January  
**Wagner Knights**  
... and their ladies

Monday 29 January  
**Viva Verdi**  
Commemorating the 100th anniversary of the death of Giuseppe Verdi

Monday 26 February  
**The art of bel canto**

Monday 26 March  
**The Silver Tassie & Der fliegende Holländer**  
Previewing Opera Ireland's Spring Season

All lectures start at 8 pm.  
Admission is free.



# IRISH OPERA DIARY

Autumn/Winter2000/2001  
Information as available at end of August

## Opera Ireland/Irish Times Lecture

Dublin, Bank of Ireland Arts Centre,  
College Green

Monday 18 Sept, 8 pm

### Whom the Gods love ...

John Allen commemorates the anniversaries  
of Jussi Björling & Fritz Wunderlich, two great  
tenors who died before their time

## Lyric Opera Productions

Dublin, National Concert Hall

Tel: (01) 475 1572; Fax: (01) 475 1507;

E-mail: info@nch.ie

Sat 30 September, 7.30 pm

CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA (Mascagni) and

SUOR ANGELICA (Puccini)

Sung in Italian, with Tamsin Dives, Nadine  
Cherry, Sandra Oman, Deirdre Cooling Nolan,  
Khosrow Mahsoori; c. David Heusel;  
p. Vivian Coates.

## Dublin, National Concert Hall

Tel: (01) 475 1572; Fax: (01) 475 1507;

E-mail: info@nch.ie

Monday 16 October

Opera and Ballet International

AIDA (Verdi)

Sung in Italian with English surtitles

## Dublin, Bank of Ireland Arts Centre,

Wednesday 18 Oct, 8 pm

The John McCormack Society presents

"I heard you calling me!" – Louis Browne

talks about the art of fellow Athlone tenor

John McCormack

## Wexford Festival Opera

Wexford, Theatre Royal

Tel: (053) 22144; Fax: (053) 47438;

E-mail: info@wexfordopera.com

Oct 19, 22, 25, 28, 31 & Nov 3, 8 pm

ORLEANSKAYA DEVA (Tchaikovsky)

Sung in Russian

Oct 20, 23, 26, 29, Nov 1 & 4, 8 pm

SI J'ETAIS ROI (Adam)

Sung in French

Oct 21, 24, 27, Nov 2 & 5, 8 pm

CONCHITA (Zandonai)

Sung in Italian

## OPERA SCENES

White's Barn, White's Hotel, afternoons at  
3.30 pm (except where stated)

Oct 20, 23, 26, 29 (11 am) & Nov 4

PORGY AND BESS (Gershwin)

Oct 21, 24, 27, Nov 2 & 5 (11 am)

LA TRAVIATA (Verdi)

Oct 22, 25, 28 (11 am), 31, Nov 3 (11 am)

LE NOZZE DI FIGARO (Mozart)

## Opera Ireland/Irish Times Lecture

Dublin, Bank of Ireland Arts Centre,  
College Green

Monday 23 October

### Nessun dorma!

John Allen discusses some Italian *verismo*  
operas by Puccini and others

## Dublin, National Concert Hall

Tel: (01) 475 1572; Fax: (01) 475 1507;

E-mail: info@nch.ie

Oct 23 & 24

Jim Molloy presents excerpts from The

"Irish Ring" – THE BOHEMIAN GIRL (Balfe),

MARITANA (Wallace) and THE LILY OF

KILLARNEY (Benedict)

Kathryn Smith, Miriam Blannersasset,

Anthony Kearns, Patrick Doherty, Derek Ryan;

Lyric Orchestra; c. Aidan Faughay

## Opera Ireland/Irish Times Lecture

Dublin, Bank of Ireland Arts Centre,  
College Green

Monday 6 November

### Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk & Madama Butterfly

John Allen previews Opera Ireland's Winter  
Season

## Opera Ireland Creative Insights

Gaiety Theatre, Dublin

The creative teams of Opera Ireland's spring  
opera productions discuss their concepts and  
answer questions.

MADAMA BUTTERFLY: Thursday 16 Nov,

1 to 2 pm.

LADY MACBETH OF MTSENSK Friday 17 Nov,

1 to 2 pm.

Admission free

## Opera Ireland Winter Season

Dublin, Gaiety Theatre

Opera Ireland Box Office: (01) 453 5519

Fax: (01) 453 5521

E-mail: info@opera-ireland.ie

November 18, 20, 22, 24 & 26, 7.30 pm

### MADAMA BUTTERFLY (Puccini)

Sung in Italian with English surtitles.

Regina Nathan, Patricia Fernandez, Sandra

Oman, Juremir Vieira, Sam McElroy, Mark

Curtis, Nyle Wolf, William Peel; c. David

Heusel; p. Georgii Isakhkhian;

d. Stephanie Pasterkamp

(sets), Sarah Bownern (costumes)

November 19, 21, 23 & 25, 7.30 pm

### LADY MACBETH OF MTSENSK (Shostakovich)

Irish premiere – sung in Russian with English  
surtitles

Helen Field, Franzita Whelan, Tatyana

Kaminskaya, Elizabeth Woods, Alan

Woodrow, Gerard O'Connor, Serguei Vlassov

Volker Vogel, Pavel Bragin, Dimitri

Kanevsky, Alexey Djugaev, Grant Dickson,

Nyle Wolf, Mark Curtis, William Peel; c.

Alexander Anissimov; p. Dieter Kaegi; d. Joe

Vanek

## Opera Ireland/Irish Times Lecture

Dublin, Bank of Ireland Arts Centre,  
College Green

Monday 4 December

### Opera for Christmas

John Allen recommends the year's best opera  
CDs

## Opera Ireland/Irish Times Lecture

Dublin, Bank of Ireland Arts Centre,  
College Green

Monday 8 January

### Wagner Knights – and their ladies

John Allen looks at some of Wagner's heroes  
and heroines

## Opera Ireland Spring Season

Dublin, Gaiety Theatre

Opera Ireland Box Office: (01) 453 5519

Fax: (01) 453 5521

E-mail: info@opera-ireland.ie

March 31, April 2, 4, 6 & 8 at 7.30 pm

### THE SILVER TASSIE (Turnage)

Irish premiere – sung in English

Sam McElroy; c. David Jones;

p. Patrick Mason; d. Joe Vaneck

April 1, 3, 5 & 7, at 7.30 pm

### DER FLIEGENDE HOLLÄNDER (Wagner)

Sung in German with English surtitles

c. Laurent Wagner; p. Nicolas Muni

## OPERA ON LYRIC FM

(Subject to Change)

Sep 09, Hérodiade (Massenet) Anna Livia  
recording

Sep 16, Carmen (Bizet) Metropolitan Opera

recording, presented by Michael Hunt

Sep 23, José Cura concert live from the  
NCH in Dublin

Sep 30, **The Silver Tassie (Turnage)**

ENO recording

Oct 07, Rigoletto (Verdi) ENO recording in

English, presented by Michael Hunt

Oct 14, Catherine Hayes Commemoration,  
recording of Suzanne Murphy concert at  
UCLH on 3 Sept

Oct 21, Conchita (Zandonai) live from

Wexford Festival

Oct 28, Orleanskaya deva (Tchaikovsky) live

from Wexford Festival

Nov 04, Si j'étais roi (Adam) live from

Wexford Festival

Nov 11, tba

Nov 18, **Madama Butterfly (Puccini)**

Opera Ireland production with Regina

Nathan in the title role, live from the

Gaiety Theatre in Dublin

Nov 25, **Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk**

**(Shostakovich)** Opera Ireland production

with Helen Field in the title role, live from

the Gaiety Theatre

Dec 02, tba

## METROPOLITAN OPERA RELAYS

Dec 09, Der Rosenkavalier (Strauss): Studer,

Kasarova, Norberg-Schultz

Dec 16, Der fliegende Holländer (Wagner):

Morris, Sweet

Dec 23, The Merry Widow (Lehár): von

Stade, Welch, Hagegård

Dec 30, La traviata (Verdi): Swenson,

Alvarez, Croft

Jan 05, Fidelio (Beethoven): Mattila,

Heppner, Leiferkus

Jan 13, Il trovatore (Verdi): Mescheriakova,

Zajick, Shicoff, Frontali

Jan 20, Doktor Faust (Busoni): Hampson,

Brubaker, Dalayman

Jan 27, Aida (Verdi): Voigt, Borodina,

Pavarotti, Delavan

Feb 03, Carmen (Bizet) Borodina, Watson,

Leech, Ferrari

Feb 10, Un ballo in maschera (Verdi) Crider,

Domingo, Agache

Feb 17, L'italiana in Algeri (Rossini)

Larmore, Kelly, Corbelli, ramey

Feb 24, Così fan tutte (Mozart) Diener,

Graham, Upshaw, Groves, Gilfrey, Pertusi

**FOUR BY VERDI:** John Allen discusses the  
dramatic structure and background of  
Verdi's *Il trovatore*, *I vespri siciliani*, *Simon  
Boccanegra* and *La forza del destino* in The  
Lyric Room, on Lyric FM at 7 pm on each of  
the four Tuesdays of September.

**THE LYRIC SUITE:** Every Sunday afternoon  
on Lyric, from 3 to 6 pm, John Allen  
presents his personal selection of  
music, most of it from the world of opera  
and music theatre.



# CO-OPERA SCORES WITH THE BAT

**An abridged version of Declan Townsend's review for *The Irish Examiner* of Co-Opera's recent tour of Johann Strauss's *Die Fledermaus*.**



Fiona Murphy as Orlofsky

It was a wonderful night's entertainment.

The set, by Alison Nalder, was quite ingenious. Using one set to act as Eisenstein's home, Prince Orlovsky's palace and Vienna's prison, with the minimum amount of changes was a feat of imagination which worked spectacularly well.

It says much for the répétiteur, Mairéad Hurley, and David Brophy, Music Director, that the ensemble work was so good. *Die Fledermaus* is a very funny opera, made even more so by Bill Bankes Jones's translation and director Michael Hunt succeeded in getting the cast to play for laughs throughout. They played at a hectic pace and sang extraordinarily well ..... the diction throughout was exemplary, so much so, in fact, that a red-haired 10 year-old beside me giggled as much as I did.

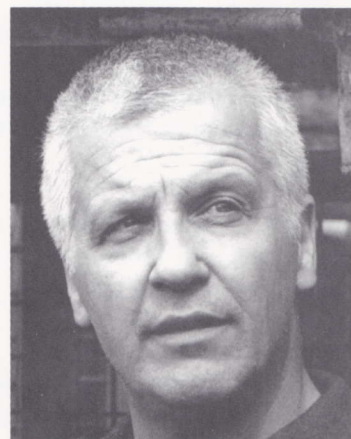
Rosalinde, Niamh Anne O'Brien, was beautifully played and musically sung; the Czárdás had tremendous verve and the Act 3 trio was wonderfully exciting. Sandra Oman sang superbly. In particular, her Laughing Song was

as good as I've heard, or seen, because she acted magnificently while capturing every nuance of the music. Jochem Van Ast was a handsome, dashing Dr Falke, alias The Bat, and Fiona Murphy was a debonair Prince Orlofsky, not the aloof, bored aristocrat we normally see.

However, it was the play between Owen Gilhooly (prison governor Frank) and Christopher Goldsack (Eisenstein) that really made this production special. Both sang wonderfully and their scenes together in Act 2 were quite hilarious.

..... an outstanding evening's entertainment. We left the theatre entranced.

*Co-Opera is the touring wing of Opera Ireland.*



## VOLKER'S FOUR IN A ROW

Volker Vogel, the German tenor who sings the role of the Shabby Peasant in *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, will be playing his fourth season with Opera Ireland. We first encountered him as a riveting Herod in the acclaimed spring 1999 production of *Salome*. Last winter he was back with what *The Sunday Times* called 'a fascinating portrait of the scheming Suisky' opposite Gidon Saks in *Boris Godunov*; and he returned earlier this year as Tikhon, the wimpish husband in Janáček's *Katya Kabanova*.

## 'Doing It' in Limerick

Mozart's *Così fan tutte* – it translates roughly as *All Women Do It* – is the perfect ensemble opera. And the complex Act 1 finale, a kaleidoscope of constantly-changing dramatic moods and voice permutations, is the ideal way to showcase the dramatic and vocal skills of aspiring opera singers.

The eighteen-minute scene was performed by six young Irish singers at the public concert given in Limerick University Concert Hall at the conclusion of this year's Opera Ireland masterclass. The masterclass, in which Suzanne Murphy trained the participants in matters of vocal interpretation and technique, was the second in the annual series run in association with UCHL, Lyric FM, IRMA Trust Ltd and The Irish Times

The three soprano roles were sung by Sarah Estill (Fiordiligi), Shirley Keane (Dorabella) and Janyce Condon (Despina). Tenor J P Hurley sang Ferrando; baritone Andrew Redmond sang Guglielmo; and John Molloy was the bass Don Alfonso. Each of singers also sang three solo numbers in a programme that ranged from Bach and Haydn to Britten, taking in many of the mainstream composers from Italy, France, Germany and Russia. The concert accompanist was Mairéad Hurley, and she and Collette Davis also played for the classes.

Alongside the vocal classes, Gerhard Markson, Principal Guest Conductor of the NSO, directed a conducting class. The attendees were David Brophy, Mark Fitzgerald, Cathal Garvey, Eimear Noone and Manus O'Donnell.

## OPERA IRELAND NEWS

John Player House  
276-288 South Circular Road,  
Dublin 8, Ireland  
Tel: +353 1 453 5519  
Editorial Fax: +353 1 840 1637  
Editorial e-mail:  
johnallenmusic@eircom.net

**Editor: John Allen**

The views expressed are those of contributors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Board and/or Management of Opera Ireland.



# THE COLONEL'S CENTENARY

**Wednesday 8 November will be the 100th anniversary of the birth of Bill O'Kelly, founding father and chairman for 38 years of the Dublin Grand Opera Society. Paddy Brennan recalls the man we fondly remember as 'The Colonel'.**

Bill O'Kelly was born in Dublin and educated at O'Connell Schools. He was involved in the Independence movement and served in various army posts until his retirement in 1958 with the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel.

In 1941, under his inspired leadership, a small group with no resources formed the Dublin Grand Opera Society. The Society produced two seasons of opera each year in Dublin, as well as touring to Limerick, Cork and Belfast during the war years and, from 1971, annually to the new Cork Opera House.

Bill was a man of extraordinarily persuasive powers. In 1948 he talked the Paris Opéra-Comique into bringing its legendary cast and production of Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* to Dublin. Two years later he persuaded the Hamburg Opera to come with *Don Giovanni* and *Così fan Tutte* – and to return in 1951 and '53. These events were watersheds in the musical life of Dublin, bringing a degree of ensemble and total theatrical experience unknown at that time. The Italian Seasons from



Lieut-Col Cav.Uff. William O'Kelly (1900-1979)

1952 on, and particularly from 1955 to 1966, are remembered and spoken of with awe, wonder and almost disbelief. For four weeks every spring, Dublin became the Italian opera capital of the world.

When Bill died on 7 November 1979, Gerard Victory, then head of music in RTE, wrote: 'Col. O'Kelly was, for all who knew him, the primary embodiment of opera in Ireland for over thirty years. His enthusiasm and energy were unbounded and his ability to surmount the formidable problems of opera production won universal admiration.'

Charles Acton, the *Irish Times* music critic, wrote: 'Bill just was the DGOS. His richly deserved honour from Italy left many of us talking about him as "The Cav.Uff", a title blended of equal measures of affection, exasperation, respect, irritation, admiration, fury at times and something akin to love all the time'.

Professor Maurice Kennedy, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Laws, honoris causa, on 13 April 1978, concluded his address by saying: 'It is right and fitting that the National University of Ireland should grant its highest award to an honourable soldier, a doughty warrior for the cause of opera – indeed, a warrior bard who has done so much to make his country a land of song'

*A full appreciation of the life and work of Bill O'Kelly will appear in the programme books for the coming season.*



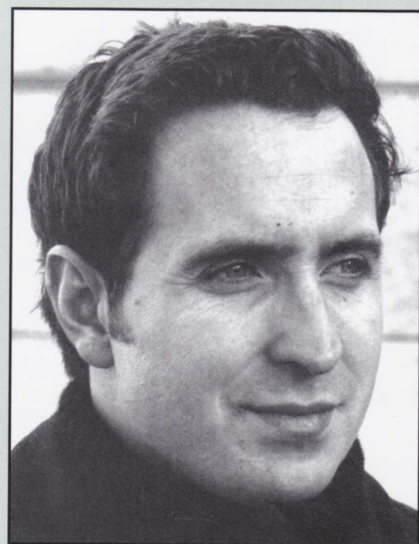
Bill O'Kelly with Maestro Napoleone Annovazzi

## The Tassie Comes Home

Seán O'Casey's *The Silver Tassie*, the play once notoriously rejected by the Abbey Theatre, will return to Dublin in triumph when Opera Ireland mounts the Irish premiere of Mark-Anthony Turnage's acclaimed operatic version at the Gaiety next April.

The work was commissioned from the young English composer by English National Opera and had its world premiere there in February of this year. Amanda Holden's libretto faithfully mirrors the action of O'Casey's plot as it tells the story of a group of young Dublin men at the time of the First World War. It follows them from their tenement home, into the horrors of the trenches, and back to the heart-breaking aftermath of paralysed limbs, lost loves and crushed hopes.

Cork-born Sam McElroy will sing the taxing central role of Harry Heegan, the young footballer whose on-the-field heroics wins the 'silver tassie' (tassie is a Scottish word meaning a small cup) for his team, but whose experiences in the trenches of Flanders, and his tragic disablement, gradually dispel his euphoria.



Sam McElroy, who starred as Figaro in last year's production of *The Barber of Seville*, and sings Sharpless in this season's *Madama Butterfly*, will head an all-Irish cast as Harry Heegan in the Irish premiere of Mark-Anthony Turnage's new opera *The Silver Tassie* next April.